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THE RELATION OF FIELD EXCURSIONS
TO THE ACTIVITIES OF LOCAL
MUSEUMS

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THE RELATION OF FIELD EXCURSIONS TO THE ACTIVITIES OF LOCAL MUSEUMS

"Museums may serve three objects. They may be institutions designed to furnish healthy entertainment, they may be intended for instruction and they may be intended for the promotion of research."—*Franz Boas*.

"There's no music like a little river's; It plays the same tune (and that's the favorite) over and over again, and yet does not weary of it like men fiddlers."

It takes the mind out of doors; and though we should be grateful for good houses, there is, after all, no house like God's out-of-doors. And lastly, sir, it quiets a man like saying his prayers."—*Robert Louis Stevenson*.

"The beauty of the world has never been of greath pith or moment to mankind. Its admirers are few, its destroyers are many. . . . Will he never learn that happiness is not a matter of possessions, and that mental content, joy of heart, a love of loveliness, are more potent factors in human well-being than naval power or commercial gain."—*John C. Van Dyke*.

Local museums, by force of circumstances, are generally required to encourage all possible methods of arousing interest in their aims and needs. As a result of these conditions, recreation, instruction and investigation, each in turn, demands attention from the curator. Much of that which goes under the name of educational work in museums is more truly described as recreative, a fact which shows that the two phases are not always clearly distinguished, or even distinguishable. Libraries are not founded for instruction merely, but recreation as well, and a similar view is developing concerning the function of museums and their activities. The educational work of local museums usually consists of its exhibits, guide books, and lectures; but by a large part of the public, the exhibits and lectures are treated as a means of recreation as well as of instruction. Museum lecture courses generally aim at variety rather than the continuous development of any subject. The same features characterize the occasional or annual outings or excursions which some museums conduct. These field excursions have not, in the past, been a prominent feature in the activities of museums, but as museums are becoming more intimately related to local needs, this phase seems destined to grow extensively. The writer has been particularly interested in the relation which field excursions may have to museum work, and the aim of this paper is to discuss some phases of this problem which have come up frequently in practical museum work.

As museums come to realize that they have already adapted themselves more or less consciously to the demands of the public for recreation, they will not be so likely to look disparagingly upon excursions which are conducted with recreation as an avowed purpose. Most curators have a distinct liking for and familiarity with the outdoor world, particularly the curators of natural history museums. For this reason, if they have sufficiently varied interests, they are in a position to stimulate appreciation of the natural features of their region; its scenery, its streams, its lakes, its forests, etc., not so much

from the standpoint of the collector or the naturalist as from an aesthetic and humanistic view point. The excursionist may look upon the trip as recreation, the curator as the beginning of a training to appreciate a first-hand knowledge of nature, which even if it leads no further, justifies itself completely. If, however, other interests spring from this soil and the excursionist returns to the fields, or to the museum with a new interest in the other activities of the museum, such excursions are doubly justified.

Much depends upon the spirit in which such an excursion is conducted. A visit to favorable localities is not in itself an assurance of success, for the excursionists must learn to cultivate a frame of mind favorable to the best results. The appreciation of scenery, sunsets, clouds or sounds is not an instantaneous process, but one of growth.

Most successful excursions of the general class are the "Saturday Afternoon Walking Trips" conducted by the Playground Association of Chicago. These excursions are carried on by the coöperation of members of the Geographic Society of Chicago, Illinois Chapter of the Institute of Architects, Woman's Out-Door Art League, Illinois Audubon Society, Chicago Library Club, faculties of the Northwestern University and the University of Chicago, and many other organizations. These excursions have been very successful and show clearly that there is an opportunity, largely undiscovered by museums, which shows how common ground may be found among a large variety of people whose interests at first thought suggest little in common. With the growth of our cities there should be a corresponding growth in these excursions. The aims and plans of these admirable excursions deserve to be known among curators. The following quotation is from the announcement of these walks:

In the vicinity of Chicago there are many tracts of woodland of great natural beauty which can be reached with slight expenditure of time and money. The lake shore with its ravines at the north and forest-covered sand dunes at the south, the three rivers, the wooded hills and the open country—all these offer facilities for recreation and relief from city life that, for the most part, are neglected.

It is felt that there are probably many persons who, for lack of time, or awed by the perplexity of routes offered by twenty-nine radiating railroads, have not ventured forth to enjoy the beauties of nature that lie profusely scattered at the very gates of the city; and that a series of walks, led by guides who are familiar with the regions visited, and who have solved the riddle of the time-tables, will at least serve the purpose of an introduction to Chicago's really beautiful environment.

To this end, you are invited to any or all of the walking trips scheduled below. The excursionists will be under no obligations to join the Playground Association. There will be no fees except those collected with the car fares on each trip.

SATURDAY, MAY 30TH (MEMORIAL DAY)—ALL-DAY OUTING

The Dunes

Take Special Train on the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad, leaving La Salle St. Station at 9:30 A.M., Englewood at 9:45 A.M., arriving at Millers, Indiana, at 10:30 A.M. Returning, special train will leave Millers at 5 P.M., arriving at Englewood at 5:45 P.M. and La Salle St. Station at 6 P.M.

Between Millers and Lake Michigan is the best opportunity to study the sand dune that is offered near Chicago. The dunes here reach a height of 150 feet or more and are covered with a thick forest growth. The effects of their resistless movement may be observed in forests in actual process of being submerged and again in the dead stumps of trees left behind as the dune has slowly shifted forward under the influence of the wind. The "dead end" of the Grand Calumet River will be passed. Few places offer such material for the study of geography in the making.

To the botanist, this territory is of equal interest, as the Flora of the east, west and south have here a common meeting ground.

Take luncheon, canteen or bottle of drinking water and tin cup.

Take waterproofs. Rubbers are not needed as the ground is sandy and rain is immediately absorbed.

A wagon will be provided to carry lunch boxes and extra clothing.

The party will walk two miles to the shore of the lake where luncheon will be eaten. The leaders of the party will build fires and prepare coffee for all. No other fires will be permitted.

After luncheon the party will break into several groups for walks of varying length, all meeting at Millers at 5 P.M.

The dunes and the dense vegetation make this country very confusing to one unfamiliar with it. To avoid becoming lost it will be well to keep in sight of the leaders and to follow their directions carefully.

Nothing but a heavy downpour on the morning of the start need deter anyone from going. A rain the night preceding would but make the sand the more compact, and walking the more easy.

If intending to take this outing, please notify by postcard Alexander M. Wilson, 51 La Salle St., Chicago.

Length of walk, 4 miles to 8 miles, as preferred. Expense \$1.

Leaders: Jens Jensen, Miss Amalie Hofer, William Hard, Graham R. Taylor, Alexander M. Wilson.

In the practical conduct of excursions, so much depends upon the leaders and upon the localities visited as to deserve fuller discussion. That the leader of a party and his assistants know the region thoroughly is assumed. In the case of the recreative excursion, the more that can be made of the natural history resources and scenic effects, within reasonable bounds, the better for the interests of the museum. Sounds, as well as scenes, should be carefully considered. The sounds of galloping waves, falling waters, the winds in the trees and the songs

of birds are to be carefully guarded if they are to be appreciated. Sounds, as well as scenic features, are often most advantageously considered in small parties, but with proper foresight many distractions may be warded off, and leaders can often do much to control such circumstances. In case of large excursion parties, some executive ability is needed and this element must be given due weight in the selection of the leader or of some of his assistants.

In observational and collecting excursions, still other qualities are needed in the leader. The guides should have, in addition to a general grasp of the situation, detailed knowledge along certain lines. Several guides may be necessary if the diversity of interests and the extent of the field is large. Each line of special interest may be conducted advantageously as a separate party.

When its aim is clearly defined, the first important step for an excursion has been taken. Considerable caution should be exercised in making a selection; very often too much is attempted. In general, it seems better to attempt less and to do this satisfactorily than to undertake in a single excursion a subject which really warrants several excursions. To maintain simplicity and definiteness of aim, some tact is occasionally necessary. The easiest and shortest route may take the party past some distracting feature which will divert attention from the main aim. Such features should be anticipated and avoided as much as possible, even if the route must be changed. Explanatory excursions, taken out of their proper order, have similar unfavorable effects as the continuity of an explanation is one of its most important features.

In recreative excursions, proximity to water, lakes, streams, sea-shore and other similar natural features, is very desirable and furnishes an opportunity to cultivate an acquaintance with the effects of moving water and other agencies, which may be made to interest large numbers of persons. The plants and animals of such situations are capable of similar interesting treatment. Where water bodies and streams are not available, forests or such topographic features as hills, mountains, cañons, glens, and caves may offer other suitable localities, because of their novelty and scenic features. Historical localities may occasionally be utilized to advantage. From the museum standpoint, it is desirable to emphasize the natural features of the region, to cultivate a first-hand knowledge of them and an appreciation of their cultural value. Such excursions may also be strengthened by supplementary reading.

A second and more frequent form of excursion is the ordinary collecting excursion. This is the favorite of the amateur naturalist and from the ranks of this class of excursionists have perhaps come the largest number of museum curators. The collecting instinct, so useful and essential in a curator, has a chance to develop under supervision on these excursions. The museum may do much for these excursionists through encouragement and guidance. It may also help some of them to carry their work to a stage beyond that of pure collecting and lead them to a practical realization of the local problems and how to investigate them.

Many collectors have developed the habit of collecting as a pastime, and although their excursions take the form of a collecting trip, yet they are primarily recreative rather than educative. Such individuals show how the different kinds of excursionists may overlap and intergrade into one another. These collecting excursions have had, and will continue to have, an important influence upon the growth of museums. These have formed the nuclei about which most of our older museums have grown up, and much of their early growth consisted in the concentration of such collections.

Well-trained collectors are an important element in the development of large and important museum collections. The training of a collector furnishes an experience so valuable in museum work as to make it almost essential to a natural history curator. So important is this factor that I note with surprise that Mrs. Cornelius Stevenson¹ makes no mention of field work in her course of training for curators. This, from my point of view, would be a very serious defect in the training of those who have to deal with natural history collections. In my own experience, I have found that volunteer collectors, largely trained through collecting and observing excursions as amateurs, may give very efficient aid to museum expeditions. As examples of the results of these methods, reference is made to the reports on two museum expeditions: "An Ecological Survey in Northern Michigan²," and "An Ecological Survey of Isle Royale, Lake Superior."³ The museum, in this way is not only serving its public and training collectors, but is also improving the quality and quantity of its own expeditions and collections.

¹ *Proc. Am. Assoc. Mus.*, III, 1909, 115-119.

² *Ann. Rep. Mich. Geol. Survey*, 1905, 1906.

³ *Ann. Rep. Mich. Geol. Survey*, 1908, 1909.

Museums have given little attention to the production of local guide books. By the coöperation of collectors and museums, local surveys may also be made. These can serve as scientific surveys and form a basis for guide books for the study of the local natural history resources. Such books will do much to improve the efficiency of museum excursions as well as to help the individual excursionist. Most of the local studies which will serve as aids and guides for excursionists have been prepared by the physiographers and geographers. It is fortunate that they have blazed the trail so well, as may be seen by an examination of the references accompanying this paper. The best local guide book with which I am acquainted, and a model one in many respects, is that edited by Grabau and Woodman on the natural history of the vicinity of Boston. There may be advantages in having more than one kind of a guide book, so that information about different kinds of excursions can be kept distinct and yet easily accessible.

Some of the same localities can be utilized by the observational and collecting excursions as are used by the recreative ones. In such excursions, the localities visited may well be taken up in some definite or systematic order, so that the observations made will have the advantage of some natural grouping of affinities, even though little more than a mention of it is made at the time. In conducting these excursions there is generally a marked tendency to cover too much ground, so that more concentrated attention upon a smaller area becomes irksome. But in general, the better the locality, the less serious is this difficulty. The earlier excursions may well be allowed to cover more ground, and as the momentum of interest increases, the area may be limited and work made more intensive. As interest increases it will often tend to specialize upon certain subjects or upon certain groups of plants and animals. The younger members may well specialize and train their collecting instincts. For my part, it seems that only a very few need to make private collections. There is a marked tendency for excursions to become almost pure collecting trips, but I believe this tendency should be discouraged and more attention should be given to careful observation, comparison and even description of the conditions or organisms in different localities. In the recreative excursions, the taking of notes by the excursionists is generally undesirable, and in collecting excursions, it will be difficult to secure careful ones. In fact, I have found note-taking to be one of the most difficult habits to develop in excursionists. In general, excursionists do not wish to stop and think over what they have seen

and then carefully record their observations and conclusions. This seems to be very generally true of collectors and yet I feel that this is not only desirable for the best collecting but is essential in the training of a field naturalist, and, I may add, of a curator of natural history. It is perhaps undesirable to emphasize this on the early excursions, and only when sufficient interest and momentum have been developed should this receive more attention.

To secure the best results from the observational excursion, the work must be individual rather than confined to the leader or a few of the more wide awake members, while the others go along as passengers, as it were. To insure individual work, it may be necessary to break up the party into groups small enough so that each may receive some individual attention. Full equipment for collecting or study will do much to favor individual activity.

A third form of excursion I have called explanatory. This is the excursion intended primarily not to collect specimens but to collect explanations, or for the purpose of interpretation. Its relation to other excursions may in some ways be compared with the relation which ordinary synoptic exhibits bear to complex modern groups in our museums; the synthetic element is to predominate over the analytic. In a certain sense many excursions may be considered as explanatory, but the usual form of a collecting excursion certainly does not belong in this group or even those excursions which deal primarily with analytical details. The explanatory excursions which I have in mind deal with general and complex relations, treated from a synthetic standpoint. They are intended to develop general conceptions of out-door relations. This form of excursion has been greatly neglected by a large number of our educational institutions, and particularly by museums.

In the explanatory excursions the selection of the leader, the localities and the order of their study is of the utmost importance. Generally speaking, this is the most difficult kind of excursion to conduct successfully. It is desirable that the localities visited should be taken up in such an order as to show the stages in the development of the subject which is being interpreted. Even many very elementary subjects, when presented in this way have a new interest and charm, and really never grow uninteresting; such are the active agents of nature—the rolling waves, running waters, a brook, the responses of vegetation and animals to their conditions of life. A study of such activities is best taken up in a developmental order and any departure

from this is made at a serious sacrifice, even with experienced persons. The perfect continuity of the processes studied should be one of the most distinctive features of this kind of excursion.

These excursions assume more preparation on the part of the excursionist, and it will be found to be a form of mental food most easily digested by the strong. Some system of careful note taking seems to me an essential in this work; at least for the average person. Such excursions will not appeal to the masses and are not planned for them, except in the simpler phases.

As a part of this series, I should be inclined to include a field study of the development of constructive or synthetic conceptions of natural phenomena. The interrelations of forces and the interrelations of organisms may be considered for their bearing upon general problems and conceptions. The struggle for existence can best be learned in the field. But how many have ever attended an excursion devoted to the study of this problem?

After the excursion has been made and good results have been secured, they need to be cared for as a regular part of curatorial duties so that the interest and momentum which have been developed will not be starved through lack of nourishment. I do not intend to discuss this phase further than to indicate that this aspect of the work must form an essential part of any comprehensive plan.

The excursions represent only a part of the recreative or educational work of a museum, and a part which cannot be replaced by exhibits, lectures or any amount of reading. Excursions, properly planned and executed will add much to the interest taken in the lectures and exhibits and will lead to more intelligent reading. Last, but not least, they will cultivate a genuine love for the out-door world and its beauty and help, in these days of sensational amusements, to make more general a healthful and better recreation for a large number of people. The educational phase of such excursions must be planned upon a truly scientific basis and should be so conducted as to afford some training in the scientific method, because in so far as museums are educational, they must realize these ideals.

From the preceding discussion, we may conclude that an ideal series of excursions for a local museum would consist of a series, each complete in itself, and ranging from those intended primarily to be recreative, to the collecting and observational, and on to those which are primarily explanatory of the local problems or of the general principles of science. In this manner the greatest numbers of the public may be reached,

their interests recognized and the confusion, which results in attempts to combine several kinds of excursions into a single one avoided. In time, some excursionists will naturally graduate from one series to enter others, but this does not argue in favor of combining the different kinds of excursions. It is desirable to allow each kind to retain its identity and serve its natural function.

I do not understand that museum exhibits are intended to be so entirely satisfying that the visitor has no desire to become acquainted with out-door nature, so with lectures and exhibits there should be abundant chances for the museum visitor to become directed to the out of doors. In general, museums are the local institutions which are best organized, interested, and qualified to undertake such work, although there are important exceptions to this rule.

REFERENCES

The following list of references will perhaps prove suggestive for those planning excursions along recreative and educational lines. Completeness is not attempted.

ATWOOD, W. W. and GOLDTHWAITE, J. W.

1908. Physical Geography of the Evanston-Waukegan Region. *Bull. No. 7*, Ill. Geol. Surv., Urbana, Ill.

This exemplifies the educational resources of a limited area from the standpoint of the physiographer.

CARMAN, J. E.

1909. The Mississippi Valley Between Savanna and Davenport. *Bull. 13*, Ill. Geol. Surv.

The latest of several educational handbooks to local physiographic problems prepared under the direction of Prof. R. D. Salisbury for the Ill. and Wis. Surv.

COMSTOCK, J. H.

1897. Insect Life. New York.

Contains useful chapters on the insect life of ponds, brooks, forests, roadsides, etc.

COWLES, H. C.

1901. The Plant Societies of Chicago and Vicinity. *Bull. No. 2*, Geographic Society of Chicago.

This shows the possibilities for the study of vegetation near a large city. The best of its kind.

DAVIS, W. M.

1909. Geographical Essays. Chicago.

Contains several papers of important bearing upon field work in physiography and geography.

EMERSON, PHILIP.

1899. Some Suggestions for Excursions with Elementary Classes.

Jour. School Geogr., 3, pp. 287-296.

FENNEMAN, N. M.

1902. On the Lakes of Southeastern Wisconsin. *Bull. No. 8*, Wis. Geol. and Nat. His. Surv., Madison, Wis.

This will indicate many features of interest to be found about smaller lakes.

1909. Physiography of the St. Louis Area. *Bull. 12*, Ill. Geol. Surv.

GIBSON, W. HAMILTON.

1883. Highways and Byways; or Saunterings in New England. New York.

1886. Happy Hunting Grounds: a Tribute to the Woods and Fields. New York.

1891. Strolls by Starlight and Sunshine. New York.

1897. Eye Spy: Afield with Nature Among Flowers and Animate Things. New York.

1898. My Studio Neighbors. New York.

1904. Sharp Eyes: A Ramblers Calendar of Fifty-Two Weeks among Insects, Birds, and Flowers. New York.

All of Gibson's books will arouse interest and direct it toward the beautiful which is to be seen in the animal and plant world. The artist and the naturalist can here find common ground.

1908. Pastoral Days; or Memories of a New England Year. New York.

GOLDTHWAITE, J. W.

1909. Physical Features of the Des Plaines Valley. *Bull. No. 11*, Ill. Geol. Surv.

Another good illustration of the chances for local studies in physical geography.

GRABAU, A. W. and WOODMAN, J. E. (Editors).

1898. Guide to Localities Illustrating the Geology, Marine Zoology and Botany of the Vicinity of Boston.

Each chapter is written by a specialist. The plan of this guide makes it far superior to all others I have seen. A model guide book for excursions.

GULLIVER, F. P.

1903. Out-of-Door Class Work in Geography. *Proc. Nat. Educational Assoc.*, 1903. pp. 857-858.

MARTIN, J. O.

1900. A Brook. *Cornell Nat. Study Quarterly No. 5*, Cornell University.

MEYERS, IRA B.

1908. Field-Work and Nature-Study. *The Elementary School Teacher*, 8, pp. 225-232, 316-326, 381-392.

A valuable discussion of the pedagogical aspect of field work.

ORR, WM.

1901. An Outline of Eight Excursions for the Study of the Physical Geography and Geology of Springfield and Vicinity. City Library Association, Springfield, Mass.

SALISBURY, R. D. and ALDEN, W. C.

1899. The Geography of Chicago and Its Environs. *Bull. No. 1*, Geographic Society of Chicago.

SALISBURY, R. D. and ATWOOD, W. W.

1900. The Geography of the Region About Devil's Lake and the Dalles of the Wisconsin. *Bull. No. 5*, Wis. Geol. and Nat. His. Survey.

Illustrates the possibilities to be found in local studies. One of the best.

SMITH, ROBERT.

1900. Home Lore; Plant Associations and Their Distribution. *Jour. School Geography*, 4, pp. 287-295.

Shows the value of studying the local plant associations. Deserves to be better known.



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TRAFTON, GILBERT H.

1905. Laboratory and Field Exercises in Physical Geography. Chicago.

Contains an excellent list of references on field work in physical geography, on pp. 83-85.

VAN DYKE, JOHN C.

1901. The Desert. Further Studies in Natural Appearances. New York.

The arid regions also have their advantages for the field excursionist.

1904. Nature for Its Own Sake. First Studies in Natural Appearances. New York.

J. C. Van Dyke's books will open the eyes of many field workers to a new world of beauty and charm. Every curator of a natural history museum should know this book.

1906. The Opal Sea. Continued Studies in Impressions and Appearances. New York.

A book for the seashore excursionist or a traveler.